



CommUUunity Matters

The Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Southwest Michigan December 2025

DECEMBER SUNDAY SERVICES

Sundays at 10:00 AM. Onsite, YouTube, or Zoom.

December 7: *Ode to Joy* with Rev. Gy

Together we celebrate joy as a source of renewal—revitalizing our faith, strengthening our commitments, and reminding us why we gather in community.

To join on Zoom, visit tinyurl.com/uuccodetojoy

December 14: *Peace, Joy, Love, and Hope* with Rev. Gy

Through a UU lens, we revisit the Nativity story not for its miracles, but for its messages of peace, joy, love and most importantly hope, born in the most humble of places but strong enough to sustain communities, inspire justice, and lead us forward together.

To join on Zoom, visit tinyurl.com/uuccbirthofhope

December 21: *Let There Be Light* with Miriam and Friends

We will pause for a moment of peace and reflection during the hectic holiday season and celebrate the Winter Solstice with stories, meditations, and songs. The choir will sing.

To join on Zoom, visit tinyurl.com/uuccsolstice2025

December 28 : *The Burning Bowl* with Rev. Gy

To welcome the New Year, it is our tradition to release all the emotional ties and bonds that no longer serve us by feeding them to the flames of the Burning Bowl. Join us to hit the spiritual reset button and reflect on making a fresh start.

To join on Zoom visit, tinyurl.com/uuccburningbowl25



Spiritual Theme for December REFRESHING

Streams of Life, our spiritual theme for the 2025/2026 church year, invites us to explore what it means to be like water—together. In December, as the water in our world turns to ice and snow, we will reflect on how its crisp, wintry form can refresh, revitalize, and make us feel more alive.

Joseph Campbell once said, *People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonance within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the joy of being alive.*

Questions to ponder this month:

- *When do you feel most alive, or feel the most yourself?*
- *And, on the converse, when do you feel least alive and least yourself?*
- *What brings you the greatest joy?*
- *What do these experiences say about you and your "innermost being and reality"?*

'TIS THE SEASON



Winter Solstice

The Winter Solstice is the shortest day and the longest night of the year. Traditionally, it is a time of both foreboding and expectancy, as the longest night leads to the return of the sun.

The Winter Solstice has become important to Unitarian Universalists as a time during the holiday season when people on different spiritual paths can share a common celebration.

We hope you will join us either onsite or online on Sunday, **December 21 at 10:00 AM** to celebrate the darkness and the light with our annual Winter Solstice Ritual presented by our members, friends, and the UCC Singers under the direction of our Music Director, Luke Kritzman.

Burning Bowl

The Burning Bowl, a Unitarian Universalist ceremony traditionally held at the cusp of the new year will take place at UCC and online on **Sunday, December 28 at 10:00 AM**. The Burning Bowl is a ritual of letting go, cleansing, intention, and hope. During the ritual, you will be invited to write down words or a phrase on a small piece of flash paper, as a way to sum up what you wish to leave behind before entering the new year. Those attending the service in person will have an opportunity to feed their piece of paper to the flames as a way to symbolically unburden themselves of that which no longer serves them. People at home, can burn their papers or rip and shred them if that is a safer choice.

Either way, the destruction of the paper symbolizes releasing the old and making way for the new.



A Candlelight Christmas Eve

Please join us onsite, on YouTube or on Zoom for a special Christmas Eve service on Sunday, **December 24 at 5 PM**.

Together, we'll celebrate the spirit of the season with **readings, carols, and the warm glow of candlelight**.

Feel free to bring your family and friends. This will be a wonderful opportunity for people of different beliefs and backgrounds to come together in the spirit of peace and goodwill.

Following the service, there will be a time for fellowship and light refreshments. We invite you to linger, connect with others, and share in the joy of the holiday season.

Volunteers are needed to help with the Christmas Eve service including greeters, readers, sound and tech folks, and refreshment hosts. There is a sign-up sheet at the back of the sanctuary if you are willing and able to help.

To register for the Zoom link visit:

tinyurl.com/uuccXmasEve2025



As always, if you can not attend the service but would like to watch it later, register for the Zoom link and we will be sure to send you a recording.



ILLUMINATE



Illuminate Your Values

During the first full week of December, set aside a few minutes each day to light a chalice and **ILLUMINATE** one of our core UU values by reflecting on its meaning and putting it into action. In the midst of one of the busiest and frazzled seasons of the year, having a few moments to center and to regain focus each day is often exactly what we need! Let this practice ground you in your Unitarian Universalist faith as we move into the holiday season and the New Year.

December 1: Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of our shared values. We are accountable to one another for doing the work of living our shared values through the spiritual discipline of Love. Click [HERE](#) for a guide that will help you illuminate **LOVE**.

December 2: We honor the interdependent web of all existence. With reverence for the great web of life and with humility, we acknowledge our place in it. We covenant to protect Earth and all beings from exploitation. We will create and nurture sustainable relationships of care and respect, mutuality and justice. We will work to repair harmed and damaged relationships. Click [HERE](#) for a guide that will help you illuminate **INTERDEPENDENCE**.

December 3: We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope. We covenant to freely and compassionately share our faith, presence, and resources. Our generosity connects us to one another in relationships of interdependence and mutuality. Click [HERE](#) for a guide that will help you illuminate **GENEROSITY**.

December 4: We declare that every person has the right to flourish with inherent dignity and worthiness. We covenant to use our time, wisdom, attention, and money to build and sustain fully accessible and inclusive communities. Click [HERE](#) for a guide that will help you illuminate **EQUITY**.

December 5: We work to be diverse, multicultural Beloved Communities where all thrive. We covenant to dismantle racism and all forms of systemic oppression. We support the use of inclusive democratic processes to make decisions within our congregations, our Association, and society at large. Click [HERE](#) for a guide that will help you illuminate **JUSTICE**.

December 6: We celebrate that we are all sacred beings, diverse in culture, experience, and theology. We covenant to learn from one another in our free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We embrace our differences and commonalities with Love, curiosity, and respect. Click [HERE](#) for a guide that will help you illuminate **JUSTICE**.

December 7: We adapt to the changing world. We covenant to collectively transform and grow spiritually and ethically. Openness to change is fundamental to our Unitarian and Universalist heritages, never complete and never perfect. Click [HERE](#) for a guide that will help you illuminate **TRANSFORMATION**.

HOLIDAY OPPORTUNITIES



Tickets are now on sale for Open House Theatre Company's production of **The Night Before Christmas**, a heartwarming holiday play by local playwrights **Deborah Ann Percy and Arnold Johnston**, directed by newcomer to OHTC, **Kailin Kenerly**, and produced by our very own **Mary Roscoe**.

Performances are at UCC on **December 12 and 13 at 6 PM** and on **December 14 at 2 PM**.

As part of its commitment to making sure that theatre is accessible to all, Open House Theatre Company is offering tickets to **The Night Before Christmas** on a Pay-What-You-Will basis. Tickets may be purchased at the door or in advance using a credit card at tinyurl.com/OHTCtickets. The suggested donation is \$15 per person; \$5 for children under 12.

Kick off your holiday season with an enchanting, family-friendly performance filled with laughter, music, and holiday magic!

Virtual Holiday Card

If you would like to be included in our virtual greeting card this year, please be sure to send a holiday photo of yourself (with or without your extended family) to the office by **Friday, December 19, at 5:00 PM**.

The virtual card will feature pictures and music and will be shared during our Christmas Eve gathering and via email to all your UCC friends on Christmas morning.



Click [HERE](#) to see last year's card.

If you need technical help taking a photo or sending one you already have to the office, there are volunteers available to give you a hand. We would like to have as many beautiful UCC smiles included in the holiday card as possible.

If you have any questions or need any help, please contact the office:

uucommunity@gmail.com

Come and Sing with Us!




The **UCC Singers** will provide special music during the **Winter Solstice Sunday** service on **December 21**.

If you like to sing and would like to join the fun, come to **Choir Practice** on **December 7, 14, and 21 at 9:00 AM**.

More practices may be set up if people's schedules allow. Contact our Music Director, Luke, for more info: luke.j.kritzman@wmich.edu

MORE HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS



Christmas in Kalamazoo

Tuesday, December 2, 2025 | 7:30pm
Centerpoint Church 2345 N. 10th St.

Presented by:
The Kalamazoo Male Chorus & Kalamazoo Ringers
With Special Guest:
Kalamazoo Symphony Burdick-Thorne String Quartet

Don't miss this year's **Christmas in Kalamazoo**, on Tuesday, **December 2**, at **7:30 PM** at Centerpoint Church on 10th Street in Kalamazoo Township.

This year, the **Kalamazoo Ringers** and the **Kalamazoo Male Chorus** will be joined by special guests, the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra's **Burdick-Thorne String Quartet**. (UCC member **David Senecal** sings with the Kalamazoo Male Chorus!)

Mark your calendars, and don't miss this wonderful annual celebration of the festive season!



Kalamazoo Community Chorale
Presents
There's Still Our Joy
Sunday, December 7, 2025
3:00 p.m.
First United Methodist Church
212 S. Park St., Kalamazoo
Freewill Offering

The **Kalamazoo Community Chorale** invites you to celebrate the holiday season at their annual Christmas concert on Sunday, **December 7**, at **3 PM** at the First United Methodist Church on Park St. in Kalamazoo. The concert will include traditional Christmas carols, new seasonal selections, and the ever-popular audience sing along. Join this talented group of choral singers (that includes UCC member **Freya Lake**) for a performance that will surely put you in the holiday spirit!



The Paw Paw Community Chorus
25th Annual
Christmas Concert
December 7
4 PM
Paw Paw United Methodist Church,
420 W. Michigan Avenue, Paw Paw.

The Paw Paw Community Chorus, under the direction of Theresa Vaughn, will be serving up lots of holiday cheer at their **25th Annual Christmas Concert** on Sunday, **December 7**, at **4 PM** at the United Methodist Church on Michigan Ave in Paw Paw. Join the Paw Paw Community Chorus (which include UCC member **Judy Halseth**) for an unforgettable evening of music.



Longest Night Service

Our friends at **Westminster Presbyterian Church** in Portage invite all who are facing the holidays with feelings of loss, loneliness, and grief to join them for a **Longest Night Service** on **Sunday, December 21**, at **7 PM**, a time of prayer, readings, quiet music, and reflection to acknowledge the difficult and hurting places that this season can hold.

FROM THE WIDER UU WORLD



Our guest perspective this month comes from Rev. Sean Parker Dennison, the minister at Rogue Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Ashland, Oregon. This essay was first shared on UU blog, [Braver/Wiser](#) in December 2016.

The Celebration in Front of Us

An awakening passed through the whole theatre, and as if touched by some invisible hand, the people stood, clapped, shouted with joy, laughed, and wept... It was blessed to be connected to—no, to be a part of a community—a people.

—Volker Kühn, in his essay about a cabaret performance during the Holocaust.

Have you felt it? The hush that falls over a crowd after a wonderful performance, just before the applause bursts forth? The feeling of transcendence as thousands of voices rise together filling a stadium with a favorite song? A rhythm that seems to sink bone-deep into people's bodies and then bursts forth in movement, from toe-tapping to exuberant dance? The surprising tears that well when an image or sound or smell reminds you of someone or some place you love?

We are in the middle of a season of gatherings and celebrations, ritual and traditions, and age-old messages of peace, goodwill, hope and freedom. We are also in the middle of a time of stress and turmoil, fear and the realization that we may be facing dangerous times.

As I hear the old stories, I find myself noticing the suffering and struggle there: a family displaced first by a king's greed and then by his fear; a besieged people who after years of occupation, rally to reclaim their most sacred spaces; or the story of those enduring long, cold nights and left wondering when warmth and light will return to them.

The stories feel so timely this year. We, like so many before us, are gathered in the struggle and the power. To be awake—to be alive—is to know both. We must know the joy and the weeping, the loss and the determination, the anger and the waiting to act. We must not allow ourselves to go numb or turn away from each other, from the old stories, or from the suffering and the celebration right in front of us.

Spirit of Compassion, help us open ourselves in these complicated times. Let us be ready to jump to our feet to applaud, to shout, to laugh, to weep. Let us turn toward each other, open-hearted and grateful for the blessing of community.



CARING COMMUNITY



DECEMBER CARING COMMUNITY NEWS

Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love.
—Hamilton Wright Mabie

Joys, Concerns, and Member News:

Our hearts are with all in our UCC family who are suffering from health issues, including **Mary Roscoe, Kathy Hays, Liz Lake, Stace Danielson, Lee Smittendorf, Dick Bott, and Rev. Gy.** May you find the comfort and relief you need.

Our thoughts are with **Dawn Renner** and her family as they mourn the passing of her mother.

We are celebrating with **Chris and Addie Petersmark** and **Kevin and Tami Brozovich**, who welcomed new family members to the world. Tami and Kevin's granddaughter, **Sofia**, made her appearance on October 30, and Chris and Addie announced **Kameron Joe's** arrival on November 5. Everyone involved is healthy and happy and absolutely delighted with these perfect little people!

Congratulations also go out to **Christopher Grathwol**, who has secured a new job and apartment in Lansing. Here is to new beginnings!

Our hearts are filled with gratitude for the Building and Ground Team - **Mike Graham, Eric Nelson, Justin Wojciak, and Dave Uttermohlen**, who continue to work on projects including new weather stripping on our doors, new curbs on the carport, and improvements to the roof. We even hear there are plans to touch up the paint on the outside of the building come spring!

We have been amazed by the generosity of folks both part of UCC and in the community. **Judy Halselth's** birthday collection for the **Paw Paw Domestic Violence Coalition** came in at over \$2000! In just a few Sundays, we collected 11 grocery **bags full of food** staples (73 pounds) to deliver to **Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes** to help our hungry neighbors. And a whole slew of **UCC volunteers** helped make the **Community Thanksgiving Service and Pie Potluck** a lovely (and delicious) event that raised hundreds of dollars for El Concilio and their mission to support our area's Latinx community.

Birthdays:

There are 18 December birthdays at UCC! Be sure to wish a happy day to all these special people:

3 – **Ken VanEseltine**, 5 – **Harold Beu**, 5—**Declan Wojciak**, 5—**Theo Wojciak**
8—**Mike Leatherman**, 9 – **Matthew Nelson**, 14 – **David Bott**, 14, – **Tami Brozovich**,
18 – **Rev. Gy**, 18— **Kaitlin Wojciak**, 19 – **Nancy Calme**, 22— **Lisa Wagner**, 25 – **Mary Roscoe**,
26—**Nicky Leigh** 28 – **Steve Tasko**, 28—**Jeannine Willacker**, 30 - **Michael Graham**,
31 – **Marcus Ragains**



Harold Beu will celebrate his **80th birthday** this month. He hopes that all his UCC family and friends will help him celebrate this auspicious occasion on **Sunday, December 7**, from **2-5 PM** at the University Roadhouse. Please RSVP to kzjuliemack@gmail.com by December 1 if you plan to attend. Click [HERE](#) for all the details. (More Caring News on page 8)

GENEROSITY SUNDAY

Remembering Friends Who Have Passed On:

Founding member **Herb Tompkins** left us in December 2001, just one week shy of age 85. Herb added so much to our services. He always willing to tell a story, sing a ditty, compose a poem, or wear a funny hat.

Welcome New Visitors:

It was nice to see first time visitors **Wendell West, Matt Demler, Jennifer Cook, Marjorie Lang and many others** at our services in November. We hope you will visit us again soon!

Everyone in the church is part of our Caring Community, and caring for one another is a key feature of the congregation. If you have a need that we can help with or some news that you would like to share with us all, pass it on to the coordinators through the UUC office: 269-324-7262 or uucommunity@gmail.com



Generosity Giving for December

Periodically, UU Community Church holds special “Generosity Sunday” collections to support local organizations that promote justice, equity, and inclusion in our community.

Our Generosity Sunday recipient for December is the **Good Samaritan Fund** at Portage Prince of Peace Lutheran Church. This compassionate ministry steps

in when our Portage and Kalamazoo neighbors find themselves in **moments of real crisis**—when the heat is about to be shut off, when rent can’t be met, when an unexpected emergency upends a family’s stability. Through housing and utility support, and other **essential financial assistance**, the Good Samaritan Fund offers a lifeline of hope right when it’s needed most. Each request is carefully and prayerfully reviewed by the pastor, ensuring that every gift truly becomes an act of Love made tangible.

To help support our neighbors in need in a meaningful way, our goal for this Generosity Giving campaign is \$1000. Donations of any amount are gratefully appreciated, but it would only take **ten UUC folks writing a check for \$100 to get us to our goal**. If it is yours to do, please consider giving generously.

There are several ways to give to our special collection for the Good Samaritan Fund

- You can place a check made out to UUC with Generosity Sunday in the memo into the offering basket anytime in December. You can also mail your check to our building.
- If you prefer to use a debit or credit card, give online using the church website or the Vanco app on your phone. Be sure to choose Generosity Sunday in the menu.
- If you prefer to give cash, we will donate all cash and loose change in the offering plate on **December 7** to the fund. On that Sunday we will hear from **Rev. Rachel Laughlin**, senior pastor at Prince of Peace to learn more about the fund and the essential support it provides the community during these difficult times.

LEADERSHIP



The Board of Trustees met on November 5. Here are some of the things they worked on:

- Discussed creating a strategic plan for **improving UUCC's grounds**
- Discussed strategies for **repairing or replacing the roof**.
- Discussed further improvements to the **sound and video technology**.

Click [HERE](#) to access the minutes from the meeting. The next board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, **December 3** at **6:30 PM** via Zoom. Board meetings are open to anyone who would like to attend. A link to the Zoom meeting can be found on our [online calendar](#). Questions about the Board of Trustees can be directed to Board President, [Dave Uttermohlen](#)

Thank YOU for Another Amazing Auction!

The Stewardship Committee is grateful to everyone who helped make the 2025 **Goods and Services Auction** on November 14 a huge success - the donors, bidders, auctioneers, and the many wonderful volunteers who organized the event. We **raised over \$7400** to support programming at UUCC!!



Grant Opportunities for UUCC

UUCC may be able to secure grant funding to support improvements to our building and grounds. The Board is looking for a volunteer who is willing to help research and pursue grant opportunities for our community. If you are interested in taking on this challenge, please contact

Board President [Dave Uttermohlen](#)

Thanks to advances in AI, the grant writing process is a little easier than it once was. **One Place at KPL** is offering **Grant Writing with AI 101** on Zoom on **January 22** from **10 AM –12 PM** to introduce you to cutting-edge assistance to ideating, drafting, and refining a proposal.

Visit kpl.gov/event/grant-writing-with-ai-101/ to register for the workshop.

WEATHER EMERGENCIES: For the safety of our members and friends, we occasionally make the decision to cancel onsite Sunday Services in the event of severe weather or similar emergencies. If Rev. Gy and the Board President decide to cancel, we will send out an email via Mailchimp to let everyone know we are not meeting at the building. We will also post closing information on our Facebook page, on our website, and on [WWMT's Closing Alerts](#), as well as local radio stations, if time permits. On Sundays when we have had a lot of snow or are under a Winter Storm Warning, please double check we are in session before heading out to church.



PROGRAM COUNCIL



Program Council—Where TOGETHER—We Get Stuff Done!

Everyone - members, friends, visitors—is invited to help create programming at UU Community Church on the **second Sunday of each month** at around **11:20 AM**. You can participate in Program Council in person or via Zoom.

We had lots to **CELEBRATE** at our November meeting:

We enjoyed great Sunday services in October with **Rev. Gy, Regan Hanley, and Marvinetta Woodley-Penn. Dr. Cybelle Shattuck** joined us for a lovely Thoughtful Thursday conversation. **Carol and Larry Higgins** treated us to a wonderful autumn hayride and bonfire. **Eric Nelson** kicked off a new year of Mindful Living practices. (72 people have signed up to attend the monthly sessions or to get links to the video recordings!) **Lots of UUCC folks** supported democracy at the October 18 No Kings rallies. **The Tech Team** purchased new computers for the office and sound desk, and the **Building and Grounds folks** replaced the crumbling curbs on the carport. It was another great month at UUCC!

Be sure to Like, Share, and Comment on our posts on Facebook and Instagram to help spread the good news about our congregation!

During the meeting, we also discussed **roof repairs and replacement** at UUCC.* Here is some of what was shared:

- The roof on the building is probably around 35 years old and coming to the end of its life
- The Building and Grounds Team has asked several companies for bids to rip off the existing roof and replace it. The range of these bids is between \$100,000- \$135,000.
- The Building and Grounds team is also seeking a bid from another company that uses different roofing materials that may be less expensive.
- A strategy to finance the roof replacement will need to be devised. It may include loans, grants from UU sources, and a capital fund drive.

The Board also shared that there has been interest from people in the community in purchasing the building . No offers have been made yet but selling the property and purchasing or leasing another building might also be a solution to our roofing issues and building expenses.

Our next Program Council meeting is on Sunday, **December 14** at around **11:20 AM**, onsite or via Zoom. Please plan to attend and help keep UUCC's programs going strong. As usual, the Youth Program will serve a soup lunch before the meeting (vegetarian and vegan options available). Your donations help support the youth program's enrichment activities. Thanks for your support!

***ROOF UPDATE:**

The Building and Grounds Team is happy to announce that after reviewing several roofing bids it has been decided to **repair the damaged roof** area only. The life of the repair is typically 7-10 years. The total cost for repairs is \$5,500, which will be funded from our building repair reserve that has a current balance of \$6,100. The repairs should be completed by the time you read this. With the completion of the repair we have a bit of breathing space before a full roof replacement is needed in the next decade. The Building and Grounds team in collaboration with the Board will **continue to look a various options related to ongoing upkeep costs**. Thanks to everyone for your feedback on the project, We are happy we were able to find a workable solution.

CONNECTION

HOLDING IT TOGETHER

HOW WOMEN BECAME AMERICA'S SAFETY NET

JESSICA CALARCO

Women's Book Group

**December 12
1:00 PM**

Holding It Together

by Jessica Calarco
Discussion Leader:
Denise Hartsough

From This is a Bookstore:

*Other countries have social safety nets. The U.S. has women. **Holding It Together** chronicles the causes and dire consequences.*

America runs on women—women who are tasked with holding society together at the seams and fixing it when things fall apart. In this tour de force, acclaimed Sociologist Jessica Calarco lays bare the devastating consequences of our status quo

***Holding It Together** draws on five years of research in which Calarco surveyed over 4000 parents and conducted more than 400 hours of interviews with women who bear the brunt of our broken system. Stories of grief and guilt abound. Yet, they are more than individual tragedies.*

Tracing present-day policies back to their roots, Calarco reveals a systematic agreement to dismantle our country's social safety net and persuade citizens to accept precarity while women bear the brunt. She leads us to see women's labor as the reason we've gone so long without the support systems that our peer nations take for granted, and how women's work maintains the illusion that we don't need a net.

The Book Group meets on Zoom on December 12 at 1 PM. If you have any questions about Women's Book Group, please contact [Dawn Renner](#). Click [HERE](#) to join the Zoom Meeting ID 996 0783 5644

Qigong Group

You are invited to join our weekly Qigong sessions, every Tuesday and Saturday morning at 9:00 AM. Newcomers are always welcome!



Click [HERE](#) for the TUESDAY Zoom link.

Meeting ID: 697 338 090 Passcode: 138550

Click [HERE](#) for the SATURDAY Zoom link.

Meeting ID: 977 5286 6838 Passcode: 383810

If you have any questions about the group, contact Freya Lake (freyalake@sbcglobal.net)



Game Gathering

Come to the 1st Saturday Game Gathering on **December 7** from **1-4 PM** for an opportunity to play tabletop games or cards with your UUCG friends.

People of all ages are welcome. Childcare is available on request.

We will be meeting in the Community Room to accommodate an Open House Theatre rehearsal.

Bring your favorite game, a beverage of choice, snack to share, and join us for a relaxing afternoon of fun, fellowship, and games.

UUCG Breakfast Group

The UUCG Breakfast Group meets on the 3rd Saturday of most months.

Their next gathering will be at **9 AM on Saturday, December 20** at **Berries Famous Pancake House** on



Westnedge Ave. Mark your calendar and plan to join the group for good company, conversation, and food.

If you have any questions about the 3rd Saturday Breakfast Group, contact Ron Crowell - ronald.crowell@wmich.edu

LEARNING AND GROWTH



THOUGHTFUL THURSDAYS

JOY! A Jewish Perspective

An Evening with Rabbi Shelley Goldman

DECEMBER 4 | 7:00 - 8:30 PM
ON ZOOM



Thoughtful Thursdays, our monthly online series, helps us explore how we can live with deeper compassion, clarity, and connection with ourselves, with others, and with the Earth. Through storytelling, teaching, spiritual reflection, and shared dialogue, we are striving to create a space that will nurture both our personal and collective transformation. Please plan to join us for our next Thoughtful Thursday event:

December 4: JOY! A Jewish Perspective with Rabbi Shelley Goldman

Rabbi Shelley Goldman from the Congregation of Moses in Kalamazoo will be with us to explore the many dimensions of joy through a Jewish lens. We'll look at **how Jewish teachings, traditions, and everyday practices cultivate joy, not just as a fleeting emotion, but as a spiritual practice that helps us find light even in the darkest of times.** All are welcome to this uplifting and hope-filled conversation! You can even invite a friend!

Click [HERE](#) to register to receive the Zoom link or visit tinyurl.com/uuccjewishjoy

More about Rabbi Goldman: She is a teacher, community organizer and social justice activist. Her favorite way to connect with other people and The Divine is through song. Born and raised in Chicago she enjoyed spending summers at Camp Tavor as a proud member of the Jewish youth movement Habonim Dror. She loves exploring the songs and stories of the Jewish people with groups of eager learners of all ages.



Rabbi Goldman has lived in Israel three different times: as a kibbutz volunteer after high school, as a Hebrew language learner and student of peace and justice, and as a rabbinical student and emerging Jewish professional. A graduate of Oberlin College, she was ordained in 2016 by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Before arriving at the Congregation of Moses she served Conservative synagogues in Pennsylvania and Indiana.

She lives in Kalamazoo with her lawfully wedded partner, two young sons, and Goldman-doodle, Leo.

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

Small Groups at UUCC are a great way to deepen your relationship with the church community and our Unitarian Universalist faith. You can drop in to most groups as your schedule allows or make regular attendance your spiritual practice. Newcomers are always welcome!



Mindful Living Group

Experienced Mindfulness practitioner, **Eric Nelson**, hosts a Mindful Living Group on the **1st Monday of Each Month** from **7-8 PM** on Zoom.

With no long-term commitment, participants can choose to attend sessions month-by-month, integrating mindfulness into daily life at a comfortable pace. This group is structured to help you develop emotional resilience, cultivate self-compassion, and foster deep, meaningful relationships.

Join Eric on **Monday, December 1** for an enriching experience that guides you toward a more mindful, balanced life and discover the transformative power of mindfulness! If you are interested but can't attend in real-time, recordings of each session will be sent to everyone who registers.

Register today: tinyurl.com/AwakenTheHeart

Sustainability Group

The UUCC Sustainability Group led by Miriam meets at **7:00 PM** via Zoom on the **3rd Monday of Each Month** to reflect on their sustainability journeys, to share their successes and failures, and to explore ideas about how to live more gently on the Earth.

The group will not meet in December but they encourage everyone to explore ways to consume less and live more sustainably during the holidays by taking the **UUCC 30-Day Sustainability Challenge**. If you didn't receive the challenge email just before Thanksgiving, click [HERE](#) to check it out. You can also for the 30 Days of Action checklist on page 15 of this newsletter or pick up a paper copy at UUCC on Sunday mornings.

The next Sustainability Group meeting is on **Monday, January 20**. Click [HERE](#) to join the Zoom meeting. Meeting ID 960 9812 1445



Quilting for Community

Quilting for Community, the quilting group at UUCC, welcomes anyone who loves to sew, create, or simply be in good company. This friendly group gathers at UUCC on the **1st and 3rd Wednesdays** from **10:30 AM to 2:30 PM**. Whether you're an experienced quilter, a curious beginner, or someone drawn to the warmth of community, you're invited to drop in, bring your lunch, and join whenever you're able.



Right now, members are crafting small, practical quilts for parents of young children. One quilt top is already complete, and the group aims to finish two more before pausing in January and February. Once finished, the quilts will be shared with the Kalamazoo YWCA and Enchanted Makeovers, organizations devoted to uplifting families and offering comfort where it's needed most.

If you have any questions, please reach out to [Marsha Laya](#).

SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGE



Unitarian Universalist Community Church 30-DAY SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGE - HOLIDAY EDITION

- Buy **Nothing** on Black Friday
- Have a heartfelt conversation with family or friends about the **ecological cost of the holidays** and share ways to consume less.
- Tell someone they **don't have to buy you anything** this year.
- Visit a **winter farmer's market** for local produce for your holiday meals. (Don't forget to bring your reusable bags when you go!)
- Add a **vegetarian or vegan meal** to your holiday entertaining plans.
- Cook from scratch** as much as you can. If cooking is not your thing, support small, locally-owned restaurants and bakeries.
- If you are hosting a party, replace plastic cups and paper plates with **reusable or compostable alternatives**.
- Bring your own **re-usable place setting** to a holiday potluck.
- Eat (or share) your leftovers! Be sure to have lots of reusable containers available after holiday meals to make sure **nothing goes to waste**.
- Make **homemade gifts** for your loved ones.
- Visit a **thrift shop** to buy gifts and decorations.
- Give a **clutter-free gift** to someone such as a class, a day-trip, or concert tickets.
- Buy gifts from local artisans at a **bazaar or makers mart**.
- Re-gift** something that you don't need anymore.
- Clean out a closet** or two and donate items to a thrift shop where other people can purchase them for gifts.
- Encourage a kid to **swap toys with Santa**. Along with cookies and milk, leave gently used toys under the tree for Santa to "take back to the North Pole."
- Look for items with **plastic-free packaging** when shopping for gifts.
- Use a **sustainable alternative for gift wrap** such as kids' artwork, old calendars, magazines, posters, fabric scraps, or paper maps.
- Use markers, crayons, or paints to **decorate delivery boxes** instead of wrapping them.
- When you receive a gift, try unwrapping it carefully so you can **reuse the gift wrap**.
- If you buy wrapping paper, make sure it is **recyclable**.
- Choose **eco-friendly holiday cards** or send out electronic holiday greetings instead.
- Re-use a holiday card** you received to make gift tags or a postcard you can send to someone else.
- Put on a holiday-themed sweater and try **turning down the thermostat** a little.
- If you plan to buy lights, **choose energy-efficient LED** and then put your holiday light display on a timer.
- Research **sustainable options for your Christmas Tree**.
- If have a real tree, make plans to **compost** it after the holidays are over.
- Be like Santa and **make a list before you go shopping** to avoid repeat trips to the store for forgotten items.
- Carpool** with family or friends to a holiday party.
- Make an end-of-year donation or volunteer some of your free time to an **organization fighting climate change**.
- Extra Credit! Make a "**Green**" **New Year's Resolution** and continue to make sustainability a priority all year long!

RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION



R.E.flections from [Miriam Epskamp](#), Director of Religious Education

From *Inciting Joy* by Ross Gay, *My hunch is that joy is an ember for or precursor to wild and unpredictable and transgressive and unboundaried solidarity. And that that solidarity might incite further joy. Which might incite further solidarity. And on and on. My hunch is that joy, emerging from our common sorrow—which does not necessarily mean we have the same sorrows, but that we, in common, sorrow—might draw us together. It might depolarize us and de-atomize us enough that we can consider what, in*

common, we love. And though attending to what we hate in common is too often all the rage (and it happens also to be very big business), noticing what we love in common, and studying that, might help us survive. It’s why I think of joy, which gets us to love, as being a practice of survival.

To be honest, when Rev. Gy and I sat down to plan out the month and saw that one of the themes was “Joy,” we both let out a little overwhelmed sigh. Joy can be hard to come by some days. We all have burdens and sorrows weighing us down. We are all seeing the dreadful stories play out in the news. We know others have it so much worse than we do.

We ask ourselves, *Where can joy be found?* And, on the off chance we do find it, *should we even feel joyful in the midst of so much anguish and pain?* I think you probably know the answer to both these questions. Joy is all around us, and our survival depends on embracing it even during the darkest of times.

Joy, like other virtues such as patience, gratitude, or kindness, is not so much a thing we feel but a spiritual practice we must cultivate. I am not talking about the toxic sort of optimism that pushes us to put on a fake smile when we are feeling despair. That is not real joy. Practicing joy is about refusing to give in to cynicism or fatalism. It’s about making time for the things that make us feel most alive, and that remind us, again and again, why things like equity, justice, and freedom are worth fighting for.

In difficult times, joy can feel self-indulgent, as if noticing beauty or laughing with friends somehow diminishes the seriousness of our struggles. But, I think the opposite is true. Joy is what keeps us from being swallowed whole by despair. It is a quiet force that reminds us we are still here, still connected, still capable of loving, and of being loved. When we choose to nurture even the smallest sparks of joy, in nature, in music, in shared stories, in acts of kindness, in community, we are doing sacred work.

RE SCHEDULE FOR DECEMBER	
DATE	VOLUNTEERS
Dec 7	Pat Timm
Dec 14	Regena and Eric Nelson
Dec 21	Multigenerational Service
Dec 28	Mary Roscoe

I’ll leave you with another thought from Ross Gay. He writes, *Joy...reminds us, again and again, that we belong not to an institution or a party or a state or a market, but to each other. Needfully so. Which we must practice, and study, and sing, and story, and dream, and celebrate. Belonging to each other as though our lives depend on it.”*

May your holidays and new year be filled with songs, stories, dreams, connections, and lots and lots of JOY! *Miriam*

COMMUNITY THANKSGIVING



Thank you to everyone who helped make the **Community Thanksgiving Worship Service** such a lovely event! Around 50 people from several different Portage churches attended. The annual service is a collaboration of **We Gather**, a group of Portage congregations working together to inspire people of faith to connect across denominational lines. Participating congregations are Chapel Hill Church, Portage United Church of Christ, Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Westminster Presbyterian Church, and UUC. Service participants included **Rev. Janet Duggins, Rev. Jerry Duggins, Rev. Mak Kneebone, Rev. Rachel Laughlin, Rev. Mary Kay Schueneman, Rev. Mike Wood, Rev. Gy Ludvig-McCartney, Kathleen Robinson, and Miriam Epskamp. Miriam Duggins** was the pianist. **Judy Halseth** directed the choir. Special thanks to all the **talented singers** in the Community Choir and all **the cooks** who made such delicious pies!

DECEMBER

DAY	DATE	EVENT	TIME
Monday	December 1	Stewardship Committee Mindful Living Group	1:00 PM 7:00 PM
Tuesday	December 2	Qigong	9:00 AM
Wednesday	December 3	Quilting for Community Board of Trustees Meeting	10:30 AM 6:30 PM
Thursday	December 4	Thoughtful Thursday with Rabbi Goldman	7:00 PM
Saturday	December 6	Qigong Game Gathering	9:00 AM 1-4 PM
Sunday	December 7	Choir Practice <i>Ode to Joy</i> with Rev. Gy; and UU Exploration for Kids After-Service Social Time	9:00 AM 10:00 AM 11:00 AM
Tuesday	December 8	Qigong	9:00 AM
Friday	December 12	Women's Book Group OHTC Presents <i>The Night Before Christmas</i>	1:00 PM 6:00 PM
Saturday	December 13	Qigong OHTC Presents <i>The Night Before Christmas</i>	9:00 AM 6:00 PM
Sunday	December 14	Choir Practice We Need a Little Christmas with Rev. Gy and UU Exploration for Kids Program Council OHTC Presents <i>The Night Before Christmas</i>	9:00 AM 10:00 AM 11:20 AM 2:00 PM
Tuesday	December 16	Qigong	9:00 AM
Wednesday	December 17	Quilting for Community NEWSLETTER DEADLINE Growth Team Meeting	10:30 AM 12:00 PM 3:30 PM
Saturday	December 20	Qigong Breakfast Group	9:00 AM 9:00 AM
Sunday	December 21	Choir Practice <i>A Winter Solstice Ritual</i> with Miriam and Friends After-Service Social Time	9:00 AM 10:00 AM 11:00 AM
Tuesday	December 23	Qigong	9:00 AM
Wednesday	December 24	<i>A Candlelight Christmas Eve</i> with Rev. Gy and Luke Kritzman Christmas Cookie Reception	5:00 PM 6:00 PM
Saturday	December 27	Qigong	9:00 AM
Sunday	December 28	<i>The Burning Bowl</i> with Rev. Gy and UU Exploration for Kids After Service Social Time	10:00 AM 11:00 AM
Tuesday	December 30	Qigong	9:00 AM

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is served by:**

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2025-2026 Board of Trustees
Dave Uttermohlen
Joel Folkert
Pat Fuehr
Kathryn Ragains-Wilson
Dawn Renner

**The next Newsletter Deadline is
Wednesday, December 17 at NOON**

Please send submissions to:

uuccnewsletter@gmail.com

CommUUnity Matters

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